

DC Historic Preservation Plan 2015  
Steering Committee Brainstorming Session  
August 2, 2011

The State of Preservation in DC

How is Preservation Doing?

Some things well, some things not so well

Preservation seems stuck in a rut—concentrated on core neighborhoods and constrained by the same old processes

Preservation hasn't figured out how to reach out to more communities

Preservation program is effective in many ways

Large parts of the city are protected by historic designation

Are we victims of our own success?

Have we saved all the important things?

Do we need to control everything?

We need to get back to basics

DC Environment for Preservation

The city is growing even in bad times

Newcomers have no idea about the L'Enfant Plan or the history of DC

Among newcomers it's less clear-cut that all new stuff is bad

There is a shift toward quality of life concerns

Many people appreciate architectural quality—new or old—as much as preserving historic buildings

All kinds of people really appreciate the city, the sense of neighborhood, and the variety of communities

Preservation also needs to be balanced with other community needs, like neighborhood shops and services

The tendency is for a small core of individuals in each neighborhood to carry the weight of preservation

Perceptions About Preservation

Preservation has a perception problem

The common perception is that preservation is a limiting factor in what we can accomplish

Owners don't want to deal with delays and having to adjust their project designs

People are worried that preservation "might" get in the way and so are not supportive

Is preservation just about making buildings shorter?

Preservation programs are only active in NW, and haven't reached out to NE and SE

A lot of people are scared of preservation, especially east of the river

In Anacostia, people love preservation by virtue of the homeowner grant program

Communities can be mobilized to go to bat for preserving a threatened building, old or even not so old

What's Important to Preserve?

Need to pay more attention to important things that happened in places—associative cultural value and not just architecture

Not enough acknowledgement of the full variety of cultural resources  
People are really interested in historical stories  
There is more controversy about preserving modern egg-crates  
Who decides what has value?

## Alternatives to Historic District Designation

There is a perception problem with historic district designation—we need to address it  
We need another tool besides historic district designation  
Can we start with smaller parts of a neighborhood and build up to larger districts?  
Is there room for a “preservation lite” alternative?  
Starting small with building-by-building landmark designation can be more effective than pursuing districts

## Standards and Guidelines

Need to develop flexible regulations that are appropriate for a variety of neighborhood circumstances  
Need to concentrate on improving guidelines and making them clear  
Need more predictability  
Are existing preservation regulations too limiting?  
Should we craft guidelines for smaller areas of several blocks and build up from there?

## Generation Gap

There seems to be a generation gap in the way people view preservation  
Young newcomers are just as appreciative of historic neighborhoods, but tend to view them as places with a great quality of life rather than as places that are being preserved as historic  
There is a generation gap in how people communicate—younger people can favor electronic instead of meetings  
But it is possible to reach a younger generation—you just have to know how and make preservation appealing

## Communications

Preservation program could do a better job of explaining the role and value of preservation  
Need to concentrate on communicating clear guidelines  
As much as possible should be posted on the web  
Thousands of people communicate on neighborhood listserves  
A lot of misinformation goes out on the blogosphere  
Buildings get torn down without any public awareness

## How to Sell Preservation

Bundling preservation with other positive goals like sustainability can be effective—“historically green”  
Need to phrase preservation in terms of humane scale, great streetscapes, etc  
Need a historic marker program for the city’s landmarks so people can educate themselves  
We shouldn’t forget the variety of means to promote preservation (cultural heritage trails, educational activities, etc)

## Supportive Connections and Alliances

We need to coordinate with other development incentives  
Preservation benefits when tied to economic development  
We should encourage capital improvements for creative space  
We need to connect resources in other ways  
Enlivening the space in vacant buildings helps to activate entire streets and neighborhoods

## Capacity Building and Public Education

We need to do more of it

Mentorship opportunities across neighborhoods can be really effective—such as “Preservation Advisory Committees (PACs)”

Many groups report that their membership numbers are down

Community organizations are being carried by a dwindling number of older members

People aren't attending community meetings

Regular community roundtables around the city would be a great asset in educating the community about preservation

Need more education about adaptive reuse

Need technical assistance but outside the designation/review process

We should build on proven preservation successes like the cultural heritage trails

## Recognizing Accomplishments

Despite common perceptions, HPO is doing a lot of outreach in communities

The preservation program doesn't publicize well enough what we do accomplish

## Who Accomplishes Preservation

When preservation went from grass roots to being institutionalized as a government program, expectations changed about how preservation is accomplished

## Improving Preservation Procedures

Public participation can be difficult because of daytime meetings and waiting times

There needs to be more clarity and transparency of decision-making

Having HPRB meetings videocast on line is great

## Preservation Planning Goals

Preservation planning should identify and prioritize areas according to levels of resources

Need to develop transferable credits and tax abatements